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ABSTRACT

The middle school program emerged against a backdrop of criticism, awareness of changing educational necessities and values, and new insights into the needs of the middle range of the student population. The precocity of youth mixed with the pseudo-sophistication of adulthood gives the middle school its reason for existence--the "transescent." The goal of the middle school is to be child-centered, so that time is allowed for growing up during the students' years of change. Ideally, the English curriculum for the transescent should provide the student with an activity-oriented, skill-developmental course of study. It must allow for diversity of interests and abilities, yet rely on the commonality of the adolescent experience. The middle school curriculum of the Baltimore County (Maryland) Public Schools reflects this concern for the adolescent. Throughout all of the sixth grade units, for example, students are involved in improvisations, oral composition, and other experiences that provide them with opportunities to generate language purposefully. The seventh grade units stress student involvement in various language and literature related activities, while the eighth grade course of study provides the student with literature experiences. Many factors are involved in an effective middle school program, among them the development of a middle school "task force," departmental parallel scheduling, team teaching, middle school teacher certification, small classes, interdisciplinary articulation, specialized report cards, and community research. (HOD)

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Barbara D. Nazelrod

Field Study in Curriculum and Classroom Instruction

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL: ITS INSTITUTION AND ENGLISH CURRICULUM

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The purpose of this study is to trace the middle school through its beginnings as a junior high school organization in the late 1800's to its present form. Included are the historical, philosophical, psychological, social, and educational rationales for its existence. Concurrent with research on this national trend is information about the English/Language Arts curriculum which has been utilized in the middle school.

Finally, this paper analyses the English curriculum of middle grades in Baltimore County, Maryland's public schools. It concludes with recommendations for necessary modifications in the County's system which are needed to best implement the English curriculum within the total middle school context.

Findings include a well-planned and well-designed grade reorganization whose structure suits its purpose. Likewise is an English program designed for the needs of the middle school student. Baltimore County's middle school program is still emerging, co-existing with its junior high school organization, Within this changing grade level structure is an English curriculum for the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades written with an eye to the future trends in grade reorganization. Baltimore County's curriculum appears exemplary in being a "student-centered" curriculum, containing objectives and activities geared toward the transescent.

In today's world of education, a world simultaneously characterized by open-space, computerized learning, and "back to basics", the creation of the middle school seems to be an almost haphazard development. Trends such as senior high school over-population and increasingly lower enrollments in the elementary and junior high schools seem to be logical undercurrents of its existence. School closings due to such shifts in student numbers also appear to be sufficient reasons to create the middle school. It would offer a practical way to solve a very real problem. While these may seem to be the reasons behind the inception of the middle school, they could not be farther from touching the real WHY of the middle school development.

PHASE I

Historical/Philosophical Perspectives of the Middle School:

Historically, the development of the middle school can be traced to 1893 with the beginning of the junior high school organization of grade levels. This concept of intermediate grades was conceived by Charles W. Elliott and his "Committee of Ten", who, in 1893 first formalized dissatisfaction with the grading level system at that time, grades 1 through 8, and 9 through 12. From the 1890's until 1918, various educational committees worked to develop the rationale for the 6-3-3 grade organization. (Lynch, 1979, p.2) By the turn of the century, at the earliest, the idea of the junior high school had become popular. In 1910 this idea became a reality with the opening of the first two junior high schools in the nation, one in Columbus, Ohio, and the other in Berkeley, California. (Stier, 1973, p.1)

The need for grade reorganization in the early 1900's was based on the judgment that the outmoded 8-4 system was unable to meet certain educational demands entrusted to it by society. In his book, The Emergent Middle School, (pp. 45-46) Alexander lists several arguments for such a change to the 6-3-3 grouping. These include:

-- The differences in organization, subject matter emphasis and philosophy.

-- The need to establish a school that could bridge the gap between the elementary and secondary levels in order to

alleviate transitional problems.

-- The differences in the social, educational, and vocational needs between elementary and secondary students.

Educators of the early 1900's, therefore, believed that a separate school level, capable of focusing on the needs of children in their early teens, should be developed. These pioneers recognized the need for better provisions in school programs for adolescents, including the need for greater pupil exploration, individualized instruction, and better articulation between elementary and secondary education. (Lynch, p.2)

Thus the educational structure in the United States was redefined into a system which would be nationally recognized. As Alexander (p. 46) later concurred, the arguments in favor of establishing the junior high "proved convincing enough" to educators in numerous school districts. By 1960, over 80% of students in our nation's schools in grades 7-9 had received their education in a junior high school.

As early as the 1940's, however, following World War II, junior high schools were criticized for their failure to accomplish what they were created to do: to be an independent structure, with its own purposes and directions. Instead, critics called the junior high a "mirror image of the senior high." (Stier, p.2) In addition, as Howard (1968, p. 1) writes, those who condemned the junior high institution claimed that the reasons for which the junior

high school started no longer existed, or were much changed. In fact, according to Lynch (p. 2), the junior high structure that had existed for so many years had several negative characteristics, some being:

-- lack of special training needed for successful junior high teaching;

-- little attention being given to certification requirements for this level;

-- lack of prestige for the junior high schools and their teachers.

Stier(p. 2) likewise indicates criticism of the junior high school by stating Alexander's (1968) arguments against the continuance of this system. In addition to the items named in Lynch's list, Alexander includes:

-- likeness of interests and maturity of ninth grade students to senior high students;

-- inflexibility and fragmentation of junior high school programs;

-- records of ninth graders being included in four-year reports to colleges.

Against this backdrop of criticism, awareness of changing educational necessities and values, and new insights into the needs of the middle range of the student population, the middle school emerged. The current concept of the middle school began developing in the late 50's. But the common organizational patterns as we know today came into existence in 1963. (Kindred, Wolotkiewicz, Mickleson, and Coplein, 1981, p. 2) A middle school generally includes grades 7 and 8 in its organization. In a study by Raymer

(1973-1974), there existed 1,906 middle schools in the United States. There were 521 which included grades 5-8; 1,092 which housed grades 6-8. The remainder included various conbinations of grades 4-9. Currently, grades 6-8 and 5-8 are the most common for the middle school organization in the United States.

Regardless of the actual grade levels, it became obvious in the 50's and 60's that what was needed was the development of educational programs for the "in-between-agers." (Kindred, Wolotkiewicz, Mickleson, and Coplein, p. 1) In 1969, David Eichorn described a child in this group as being a "transescent" -- the period of not being a child or adolescent. (Lynch, p. 3) The middle school, then, developed as the educational haven for the transescent, that child between 11 and 14 years of age, that child-in-change. Physical, emotional, psychological, and social changes are occurring simultaneously, creating a time of unprecedented flux. As one anonymous student wrote about these confusing years in a teen-ager's life:

"I'm sometimes sullen, often shy, acutely sensitive.
My fear erupts as anger. I fin/ it hard to give.
I talk about myself when I'm afraid,
And often spend a day without anything to say . . .
Often I'm too serious, seldom predictably the same.
Sometimes cold and distant,
Probably I'll always change.
I bluster and brag, seek attention like a child.
I brood and pout, my anger could be wild.
I shake a little almost every day
Because I'm more frightened than anyone can know. . .
And if, at times, I show my trembling side
The anxious, fearful part I hide,

I wonder,
Will you be my friend?"

As this verse indicates, these pubescent teen-age years rank high as one of the most difficult growing periods in a person's life. Pre-adolescents and early adolescents find themselves to be part of a unique group as far as growth and development are concerned. A marked difference exists among and between these children in growth rate, height, weight, sexual maturation, and academic skills. Yet they also share commalities of experiences, hopes, interests , egos, and relationships. (James, 1981, p. 77)

Transescents are an uncanny combination, at once striving for independence, yet being pathetically unsure of themselves; trying to conform with peer groups, yet wanting adult approval; acting just-so-sophisticated, yet suffering from a noticeable lack of grace. They are, as Howard aptly states, "on the edge of puberty." (p. 2)

Until the 1960's, no widespread movement to create new programs for this age had been developed. It became the task of the middle school to create and carry out such programs in order that the obvious needs and characteristics of the transescent could be met.

From its unsure beginnings forty years ago, the middle school is an idea whose time has come. By 1968, 1,101 schools "for the middle" could be found in the United States. By 1969, 2,298; by 1975, 4,500 to 5,000. There is no count as to the number of middle schools existing today. (Dyer,

(1980, p. 60) One thing, however, is for certain: such a growth pattern indicates that the middle schools are doing something right.

Educational Rationale for the Middle School:

The founders of the junior high school level were correct in recognizing that the educational needs of the adolescent warranted a separation from the 1-8, 9-12 system of grade levels. However, they were unable to foresee a two-fold problem which would be widely recognized by the second half of this century: 1) that junior high school programs would fall short in fulfilling the purpose for which they were developed, and 2) that changing times would have a tremendous impact on the nature and subsequent various requirements of the adolescent, making it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to meet their various and changing needs.

The middle school was created to correct the programs for the transescent which had been attacked by educational leaders. Areas of criticism include: high school-type scheduling, inflexible student groupings, improper guidance approaches, approaches to curriculum, and high school-type student activities. Founders of the middle school realized that the education of students between primary and high school years must be uniquely and individually tailored so that the tools of learning and living acquired in the early school years may become the skills needed to recognize each child's potential. The middle school experience, therefore, was meant to be the liaison between youth and

adulthood. (Lynch, p. 3) "In general," cites Alexander, (p. 12) "the proponents of the middle school envisage a school adapted to a wide range of children, who . . . have more in common with other than with elementary school children or high schoolers." It would be assumed that a child in the middle school would possess some mastery of the tools of learning, yet not be ready for the academic specialization of the high school.

The environment and programs of the middle school must differ in fundamental respects from the elementary and high schools. As Alexander writes in The Emergent Middle School (p. 12):

> "Its facilities must be more varied and complex than the elementary school's, yet . . . not be as elaborate nor on the same scale as those of the high school. The atmosphere must be suited to the social as well as the intellectual needs of the youngsters, providing more opportunity for social exchange than the lower school but setting more limits than an upper school. The total range of academic offerings should . . . be more readily accessible to the youngsters than in a high school."

In addition to re-shaping school programs for the adolescent, the creators of the middle school had to consider the change in the nature of the 11-14 year-old during the last several decades. The increased and divergent changes in the physical, emotional, and social growth among students this age is greater than among students of other ages. Children are maturing earlier, as indicated in studies which show, for example, that girls attain

sexual maturity 1.3 years earlier than would have been characteristic fifty years ago. (Stier, p. 2) On the whole, younger children have more awareness of personal changes and changes occurring in their surrounding environment. Mass media, telecommunications, and other technical devices account for these increased awarenesses. Thus today's adolescents are more sophisticated learners than was true even a generation ago.

Lynch (p. 6) cites reasons for this earlier onset of adolescence, this "downward shift", as being due to climate changes, improved diet, and sharply modified social interactions. The middle school must recognize the dynamics of these changes. It must provide programs whose major purpose is to create a facilitative climate enabling the pre- or early adolescent to understand himself and the changes occurring within and around him. The total middle school program was designed to de-emphasize sophisticated activities of the junior high school, and dwell on the personal development of the students. Opportunities for innovation need to be fostered: team teaching, individualized instruction, flexible scheduling. In short, the middle school must be an institution at once flexible, yet steadfast. This is necessary in order to adequately serve the youth for whom it was designed.

Psychological/Social Rationale for the Middle School:

> "The middle school youngster . . . is a pre-adolescent emerging from childhood in slow stages, sometimes awkward and insecure, sometimes facile and adept, frequently concerned with self-assessment, often amazed by newly developing powers, constantly in need of appropriate opportunities for exploration and venture, sometimes capable of adult behavior and responses, and frequently in need of opportunities for trial-and-error in situations where error is acceptable." (Alexander, p. 12)

Because the middle school student is in such a psychological state of flux, coupled with earlier physical maturation than previous generations, the result is an existence characterized by tensions and emotional anxieties. A psychological rationale for middle school grouping is to include the grades and ages where such effects of pubescence is most likely to occur -- ages 11 to 14, grades 6-7-8.

In his book, Teaching in the Middle School, Howard, (p. 3) cites Mead, who concurs that children physically mature at a younger age than did their parents. As a result, they become caught in a pattern of earlier dating, going steady, paring-off, and emphasis upon vocational choice earlier than the previous generation. In addition, as products of the social environment in which they live, children likewise are reaching mental maturity at a younger age. Piaget and Inhelder are quoted in Howard (p. 4) as supporting the tenet that the current social environment

acts as a variable in the development of mental operations. These include the ability to perform formal thinking, deal with abstractions, and to conceptualize. In the past, children acquired these abilities between the ages of 12 and 14. These cognitive skills have been appearing at an earlier age than previously, due largely to increased experiences and exposure to the social environment. Thus, the belief that ninth graders should be placed in the high school level and moving the sixth grade with the seventh and eighth grades is supported.

David Eichorn (p. 23) follows that the years since World War II were marked by an increased awakening and development of the interests and attitudes of American youth. Cultural changes are responsible for increased intellectual and social experiences which were not previously possible. As a result, adolescents are faced with an increased pressure to conform to peer groups and fads. The outgrowth is an increased exposure to possible conflicts and desire for teens to speed up an already increasing phenomenon: loss of childhood.

This desire for earlier sophistication among young people does not mean that adolescents are readier for new ideas and new experiences. Nor are they quicker to understand. This same sophistication, as Coleman (p. 42) states, " . . . frequently means they are much more difficult to

teach, more unwilling to be in the position of 'learner,' have less patience with teachers, and are not so apt to regard teachers as authorities."

The psychological and sociological dilemma of the middle school is to deal effectively with this child-adult who is aware of himself and society, but not yet capable of understanding what is seen. (Havighurst, p. 2) This precocity of youth mixed with pseudo-sophistication of adulthood gives the middle school its reason for existence: the transescent. The goal of the middle school, therefore, is to be child-centered, so that during the students' years of flux, time is allowed for growing up.

PHASE II

The Middle School/English Curriculum:

Regardless of the subject being taught to the middle schooler, one thing is certain: The curriculum must be flexible, varied, and reflect numerous learning strategies designed to serve the needs of each individual child. Without these qualities, no curriculum can account for the myriad of differences which exist among children of this age group. (Stier, p. 3) Alexander, likewise, is quoted by Stier, (p. 4) as reinforcing that the " . . . primary thrusts of the middle school" should include a focus on the individual and a flexible and varied curriculum. These qualities of curriculum are important in that they help to " . . . ensure continuity in learning by structuring the curriculum along a continuing progress model." As statements such as these indicate, the middle school represents more than just a grade reorganization. Curriculum changes based on the specific needs of the middle school student constitute a large part of what is truly meant by "middle school."

Often the middle school student is characterized as a child "in change," "in flux," or "in between." This changing person requires a total curriculum which is geared toward the student population, complete with varying needs, maturity levels, and interests. However, in addition to being largely different among themselves, children of middle school age also possess certain common characteristics

which separate them from younger elementary and older high school students. These characteristics include an increase in peer pressure, hightened self-awareness, the onset of puberty and its physical, psychological, and social significance. The curriculum for these grade levels, therefore, must be able to be flexible enough to serve individual needs, while simultaneously be of interest and relevance to those in the middle school age group.

The literature for the middle school English curriculum is sparse due to the fact that little has been written on this topic. As Daniel Dyer (1980, p. 61) reports, no book on the subject had been written in the 1970's, when the middle school division was in full swing. This fact is further supported by Simmons, who is quoted in Dyer's article (p. 60): "There is a general lack of interest about young adolescents and their curriculum."

Dyer (p. 60) cites several reasons for this "lack of interest" and subsequent near absence of written thought about the intermediate English curriculum. They include:

-- The junior high/middle school has long been regarded in and out of the educational profession as a wasteland.

-- Very few schools of education have specific programs to train intermediate school teachers.

-- Very few states offer middle school level certification.

-- Not too many educators are sure what function the intermediate schools are or should be.

-- Middle schools are frequently staffed with teachers and administrators who are trained to function at a different level and may therefore be a bit unsure of their purpose.

Dyer's statements indicate that as an educational limbo, the middle school does not carry the importance necessary for the formulation and implementation of a specialized English curriculum. And if it does exist, the curriculum is not noteworthy enough to find its way into the literature.

In spite of Dyer's negativism, evidence does exist to indicate that English curriculum is being formalized in accordance with the philosophies and goals established for the middle school. Proponents of this belief find that the middle school English classroom was designed to be the focal point of education in the intermediate program. The atmosphere of the English/Language Arts classroom is one which promotes a variety of interests, meets a wide range of needs, and subsequently allows for individual growth and ideas. (Neininger, 1975) These general objectives follow the over-all specialized goals of the total middle school program: to have a flexible, comfortable environment which allows for the individuality of its students.

More concretely, the middle school English curriculum has been described as a comprehensive study of English. Students in the intermediate grades learn a curriculum geared to help them to clarify, order, interpret, and communicate experiences through the skillful use of the lan-

guage. In order for these language arts skills to be mastered, students follow a course of study in which oral and written skills are developed and practiced. This is done experientially, or through "performance-oriented" methods, such as small and large group discussions, through contact with literature, role playing, and through utilization of various communications media. (New Orleans Public Schools, Curriculum Bulletin, No. 57) These modes of "active learning" fit in well with the physiological make-up of the adolescant. An inactive, irrelevant English curriculum would likewise prove ineffective.

Ideally, the middle school English curriculum, like the institution of the middle system itself, should break the patterns established for the junior high school curriculum which preceded it. In particular, this level of curriculum should retain the teaching of vital skills, yet utilize unprecedented teaching techniques. Such implications for the middle school English program which run counter to traditional theory and practice in their teaching approaches have been out into practice in the New Orleans Public School System. Many of these innovative practices include:

-- discussion, the core of the English program, as a means of building students' self-confidence and as a means of diagnosing their language needs.

-- writing for fluency preceding concern for "correctness".

-- performing of language tasks as opposed to memorization of abstract information about language.

-- preponderance of student talk as opposed to teacher talk.

-- use of language to learn grammar instead of learning it through formal linguistic analysis.

-- mechanics and spelling as the means toward better written expression, not the reverse.

-- use of film and television as valid and vital media to extend students' range of experience to form the bulk of student writing.

-- use of vicarious experiences which are not too remote from personal experiences for use in composition.

Each of these types of activities clearly fits in with the scheme of the middle school curriculum. Each can be individualized, experience-based, yet still structured in order to achieve specified educational goals.

In a well-outlined manner, Johnson (1981, pp. 41-42) states the four major components of the middle school English curriculum. He explains that the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing must provide a bridge between what is taught in the elementary and senior high school. For this reason, the middle school English curriculum sets out to do what no other grade or subject area can: to reinforce a student's listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities to analyze language and to develop insights into literature.

Ideally, then, the English curriculum for the transescent should provide the student with an activity-oriented, skill-developmental course of study specifically designed for the adolescent. It must allow for diversity of interests and abilities, yet rely on the commality of the adoles-

cent experience. The English curriculum is as unique as the students it fashions; it, too, merges and re-emerges into new design.

Even though skeptics such as Dyer may express dissatisfaction with present curriculum developments, those less critical are able to see the middle school English curriculum as perhaps it truly is: a curriculum like the transescent -- in the process of becoming.

PHASE III

Baltimore County's Middle School Curriculum:

As Maryland's largest county, both geographically and in population, Baltimore County likewise takes pride in having one of the State's finest educational systems. The specialized area of English/Language Arts is no exception. As with the changing educational developments in the Nation, Baltimore County has also shaped and re-shaped its English goals and curriculum. The last three decades have been characterized by "Core" programs, behavioral objectives, "scope and sequence," functional reading, and the endless focus and refocus of the English basics.

Historically, the secondary level English program of Baltimore County remained relatively static from the 1940's until 1966. During that time, English was correlated with social studies to form what has been called "Core" curriculum. In Core, the English language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking " . . . were practiced and learned within the context of social studies as well as in the literature units outside the core." (Curriculum Committee, Baltimore County English Curriculum Bulletin, Grade 7, 1967, p.1) This Core program was considered the most effective course of study Baltimore County could offer. By 1966, however, the need to provide a "content of ideas" within the field of English itself had become crucial. This need for a separate, specialized bulletin of English instruction chronologically

coincides with the nation-wide swing toward the development of the middle school and the concurrent dissatisfaction with the junior high school.

The year, 1966, marked the first time in the County's history that three teachers were released full-time to construct an English curriculum. During this year, general objectives for the existing junior high English program, a sequence of units for the three-year program (grades 7, 8, and 9), and model units as examples of procedures for summer workshop participants were developed. Within the span of a year, the junior high school course of study in English was created. Included in the curriculum were activities and procedures in reading, literature, oral and written composition, and language. After a twenty-six year respite, Baltimore County's English curriculum on the junior high level was reconstructed, reshaped, and revitalized.

Future plans for this level of curriculum were also stated in the curriculum guide. They included:

-- the tightening of sequence of activities, from simple to complex, in both content and language skill development.

-- the provision of greater flexibility in dealing with pupils of below-average ability.

-- to re-write units . . . where teachers have indicated that revisions or additions are necessary.

-- the preparation of a handbook for all teachers of secondary English, grades

> 7-12 . . . (containing) charts that summarize every unit in the English program, so that teachers of any particular grade may get a quick view of the whole program. (Curriculum Committee, 1967, p. 2)

Thus, a focus of the English curriculum was to the future, whereby weaknesses in the 1967 course of study could be corrected, and additions could be included.

In 1978, a revised County English curriculum guide for Grade 8 was prepared, as was a 7th Grade guide in 1979. The Preface of both courses of study are exact, as is fitting for two "middle" grades. The County's efforts to re-work the curriculum is stressed:

> "This bulletin represents one stage in the continuing process of revising and updating the Baltimore County English Program . . . (Included in the Bulletin is) an increased emphasis on the following:
>
> -- the English Program as basically a reading, writing, and language improvement program;
>
> -- a concentrated effort to clarify objectives so that the relationship between learning experiences, instructional materials, and teaching techniques is unmistakably obvious to students, teachers . . . ;
>
> -- the assessment of student interests, abilities, needs, and knowledge as a basis for planning realistic instructional objectives;
>
> -- an increased use of student involvement and judgment in the planning, implementation, and assessment of learning experiences;
>
> -- learning experiences, instructional materials, and teaching strategies designed to promote language generation among students;
>
> -- required basic learning experiences in interpreting, composing, and language as part of a sequential K-12 English Program."
>
> (Curriculum Committees, Baltimore County English Curriculum Bulletins, Grade 7, 1979 and Grade 8, 1978, p. 1)

In addition to these items of increased emphasis, both curriculum guides include a description of the ever-all English Program which the new guides explain:

> "The English Program introduces students to literary, linguistic, and rhetorical traditions and forms . . . encourages student involvement in all its aspects. Direct, real experience -- listening, viewing, improvising dramatically, composing, and speaking -- initiates most learning experiences. The program emphasizes learning through all the senses so that learning is total rather than solely verbal. Participation is further encouraged by the implementation of activities which guide the student toward the discovery and articulation of significant concepts and generalizations." (Curriculum Committees, 1978 and 1979, p. 2)

The Preface to the 6th Grade English guide published in 1979 also contains similar concepts. Of particular significance is a statement explaining that, in 1978, elementary teachers were asked to "identify the most important learning experiences they provided children in the areas of interpreting, composing, and language." The result is the present course of study for the English Language Arts Program in the elementary school, grade six, or in the middle school, grade six. This program provides " . . . a variety of basic learning experiences in each of the three major strands: oral and written composition, the nature and structure of language, and reading literature." (Curriculum Committee, Baltimore County English Curriculum Bulletin, Grade 6, 1979, p. 3)

The purpose of stating these similarities in the written intentions and related goals of the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade English curriculum guides is to show the natural likenesses of these three grade levels prior to the development of the

middle school unit in Baltimore County. As early as the mid-to-late seventies when the revisions of curriculum for these three grades were in progress, the writers of curriculum recognized the apparent likenesses in the educational needs of students ages 11 to 14. The key throughout these introductory passages has been the use of the words: experience, student involvement, participation, discovery. With relation to classroom activities, words such as these indicate the utilization of a curriculum not stagnant in nature, but one which if focused on the student as an individual and within the context of a class of similar individuals.

Developed for the 6th graders in elementary school and for the 7th and 8th graders in junior high, the curricula for these levels has been termed, "student-centered." As stated in the 7th and 8th grade bulletins, "This curriculum is designed for students from Baltimore County, a fast growing, rapidly changing area of the United States . . . It reflects the designers' concerns for the student -- his needs, his search for identity, his triumphs, his aspirations, his failures, his frustrations, and his quest for happiness in a constantly changing world." (Curriculum Committee, 1978 and 1979, p. 5) This philosophy reflects that which helped to re-shape and form the middle school unit which developed nation-wide in the 1960's. Even though the middle school movement did not take hold in Baltimore County until a decade later, the curriculum designed for the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade student was formulated in accordance with the middle school concepts. In addition to the

philosophical intent, this includes the sociological and psychological aspects as well. Again, this view of the changing adolescent in a changing world, a child who has the need for a very specialized curriculum, is quoted in the 7th and 8th grade English bulletins:

"The teenager is perplexed
-- by the effects of physiological change.
-- by the numbers and complexity of the decisions he is expected to make.
-- by the bombardment of auditory and visual stimuli to which he is exposed.
The teenager is frightened
-- by the uncertainty of his own future.
-- by the intellectual demands of an academic program.
-- by the struggle inherent in his effort to achieve social maturity.
The teenager is motivated
-- by natural curiosity.
-- by the need for affection, recognition, and security.
-- by the need to achieve and maintain acceptance by his peers.
-- by the need to acquire means of self-expression."

(Curriculum Committee, 1978 and 1979, p.[illegible])

In accordance with this rationale, the activities in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade English curriculum guides provide the students with opportunities to:

-- acquire the skills, the knowledge, and the flexibility needed to handle the variety of language roles demanded by society.

-- receive instruction in language that will help them control basic forms of oral and written composition, and that will help them interpret non-verbal as well as verbal systems of communication.

-- add to their understanding of the forces that influence human behavior.

-- experiment with new concepts and new ideas.

-- examine alternatives for the future.

Thus, with such a complete, well-structured, student-centered English curriculum, Baltimore County moved to the beginnings of the middle school.

The elimination of the existing junior high schools and the formation of the middle school has not been a simultaneous, county-wide project. To date, both still exist. However, to assist in the County's reorganization as it occurred, a Middle School Direction Committee and The Middle Years Program Committee were formed. In a publication entitled, The Middle School in Baltimore County Public Schools, these two committees outline County policy regarding the middle school development. Repeatedly, it is expressed that the junior high school -- its educational goals, programs, and basic school organization -- is the basis and springboard for the middle school. It is stated that even though a middle school organization offers the potential for an even better educational program than that offered in the junior high, Baltimore County has an existing " . . . good junior high school program." (Middle School Direction/Middle Years Program Committees, The Middle School in Baltimore County, 1981, p.3) Some reasons given to support the change, however, include the like grouping of physical and mental maturity levels in grades 6 through 8, more flexibility in scheduling, and inter-disciplinary cooperation. The possibility for these implementations is not allowed with the 9th grade in the same building.

This practical approach to the change to the middle school

is further supported by this statement regarding curriculum:

> "It is important to stress that sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth grade pupils are offered the same curricula regardless of whether they are housed in an elementary, a middle school, or a junior high school. With either organization, heavy emphasis is placed on the teaching and reinforcement of basic skills as a foundation for pursuit of the senior high school program." (Middle School Direction/Middle Years Program Committees, p. 3)

In contrast, however, is a recognition for a program to fit the specialized needs of the middle school student:

> "In order to provide a comprehensive program for early adolescents that is relevant to their individual needs, as well as societal demands, goals must be established which lead to the development of self-directing individuals." (Middle School Direction/Middle Years Program Committees, p. 9)

Several goals for instruction and organization which are necessary in establishing a program for students in the middle years is also suggested. Included are those which particularly specify intentions for the middle school, namely:

-- to provide an adequate and secure transition between elementary school and senior high school.

-- to create a learning setting relatively free from the pressures of sophisticated and highly organized social events.

-- to involve the community in implementing the school programs for the middle years.

-- to create an environment that provides adequately for the wide-range of individual differences in the intellectual, psychological, aesthetic, social. and physical development of boys and girls." (Middle School Direction/Middle Years Program Committees, p. 10)

In order to accomodate these and other objectives established for the middle school, the curriculum, as well as the

total school program should have as its major goal " . . . the acquisition of proficiency in the skill and procedures through which these disciplines contribute to the understanding of human nature." (Middle School Direction/Middle Years Program Committees, p. 23) The English program which consists of units in which literature and reading are integrated with language and composition is structured to do so. The program, likewise, is designed to introduce students to literary forms and archetypes, to emphasize literary selections which are relevant to students' experiences, and to provide for sequential development of the concepts and skills which will improve the students' reading and writing abilities.

The middle school English curriculum is nestled in the over-all County grade reorganization. It represents years of formation and re-formation, dating back to the sixties and with revisions in the seventies. It is not, however, a different English curriculum than that established for junior high school students of the past, nor for those existing today. The skill emphasis is the same in both grade level organizations, as is the importance of teaching those skills. Because there has always been an awareness of the transescent's specialized educational, intellectual, social, and psychological needs as manifested throughout the junior high school English curriculum, the creation of the middle school specifically for the changing adolescent has not brought about a change in the curriculum.

PHASE IV

Recommendations for the middle school and related English programs:

Baltimore County's English curriculum for the emergent middle school appears to be ahead of national trends in recognizing the need for, and implementing specialized courses of study for the transescent. Even though the present curriculum for the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades is the same as that written for these grade levels in their previous elementary-junior high school framework, it was obviously written with the student as the focus. As has been stated, the English curriculum is "student-centered": its philosophies, learning objectives, basic learning experiences, and suggested activities as enumerated in the curriculum bulletins, are exemplary in their view towards the needs of the transescent. Evidence exists to indicate an awareness of the changing adolescent's need for a varied course of study; the English basics are stressed within the context of various experiential activities. Throughout all of the sixth grade units, for example, "students are involved in improvisations, oral composition, and other experiences which provide them with opportunities to generate language purposefully." (Curriculum Committee, 1979, p. 3) The seventh grade units stress student involvement in various language and literature-related activities. The eighth grade course of study, likewise, provides the student with "literature experiences" including the reading and studying of various genre of literature, and related language activities.

Preceding the detailed language and literature units of each grade level is the stated philosophy and purpose of the curriculum. As has already been noted, these are in accordance with established middle school guidelines. The instructional purposes and programs which Baltimore County offers its middle school students in the English/Language Arts area of curriculum are trend-setting in relation to the over-all middle school movement in the Nation. The programs seem to be developed with an eye to the present as well as future needs of the adolescent for whom they were written. Baltimore County's writers of curriculum were, at the very least, visionary in their perceptions.

While the English curriculum for the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade seems to be without need of revision to fit the scheme of the middle school, some on-going areas of concern, however, can be addressed in order to maintain the proficiency of the middle school English program. Many factors are involved in the maximum utilization of a middle school program, including the physical nature of the building, cooperation and competency of administration and teaching staff, interdisciplinary articulation, and budgetary concerns. With these in mind, recommendations include:

1. Development of a Middle School "Task Force": The focus of such a committee would be to examine curricular and administrative policy and procedures in middle schools cur-

rently in operation. Recommendations for optimum performance of this grade reorganization could then be made. Of extreme importance is an open line of communication between this committee and all administrators, chairpersons, and teachers who are involved in the middle school. A bulletin or other publication should be issued regularly to insure that two-way communication exists.

It would be of benefit to include members of each subject area on this committee in order to guarantee the maximum in inter-disciplinary communication.

2. Departmental parallel scheduling: Scheduling of this type allows for grouping and re-grouping of students as the need arises. Such flexibility facilitates individualized instruction according to student need and capability, as well as allowing for optimum use of teacher resources.

3. Team-teaching: Particularly in an "open space" area, the teaming of teachers can best maximize teacher and student abilities, and school facilities, as well. Such teaming allows for student differences in that students are exposed to two or more teachers per class period, and not a one-to-one daily encounter with a single teacher personality. Teachers, likewise, can enjoy exercising different teaching approaches and techniques not possible in a confined classroom.

4. Middle School certification or mandatory middle school teacher training: A teacher in the middle school needs specialized training in order to be most effective in dealing

with the adolescent in the middle grades. State certification on the secondary and elementary levels overlaps the middle grades, but it does not provide the teacher with the specialized background which the transescent's needs warrant.

Because middle school certification is not yet possible in Maryland, training should be provided for the middle school teacher. This training should include the instruction of teaching techniques geared to the adolescent, such as the use of media to draw from their experiences, and motivational activities to help teach the English basics. Baltimore County's film library and media services provide excellent sources from which to draw materials for classroom use. Today's adolescents are a media generation, and English/Language Arts teachers, in particular, would do well to work with this fact rather than fight it.

5. Small classes: Wherever possible, small classes should be maintained in order to allow for the individual attention and teacher-student interaction needed by the middle school student. The smaller the teacher-student ratio, the more this is possible. It is difficult, if not impossible, for a teacher's attention to be diverted to thirty students, at once all in need of encouragement or directions. An effective teacher must be able to provide students with "success experiences" which can be rendered more often when class sizes allow for personalization and individualization

of activities.

6. Inter-disciplinary articulation: This is an important aspect of "student-centered" curriculum, for it allows a joint effort to take place in educating the student. If teachers would pool resources such as literature and use of films, and combine talents in a team approach, students can see a relationship between disciplines as well as what is meant by "total" education. Also, this would dispel the atmosphere that each class is a separate entity, where "never the twain shall meet." Likewise, inter-disciplinary team meetings among teachers of similar sections to discuss and work with student concerns would also be of value in working with the middle school levels.

7. Specialized report card: A report card created for middle school student rather than a County-wide "secondary level" means of evaluation would be of benefit to the overall middle school program. A report card of this nature would allow for inclusion of specific courses of study and electives geared toward the middle school. In addition, entries under non-academic areas such as "citizenship" and "work habits" can be tailored to the adolescent.

8. Community research: Research on each school community should be done in order to yield insights into the nature of local needs which can be applied to the implementation of the standard curriculum and innovative programs. The school's community is an untapped resource; utilizing it can

give relevance to school endeavors. Activities such as field trips to local points of interest, guest speakers from community businesses and organizations, and parent-sponsored functions can help to achieve this result. A school-wide assembly program on a regular basis for such a purpose would give impetus to a community-related program.

Teachers of various disciplines could use this community-based research and follow-up as the springboard for various classroom activities. English-related activities include classroom discussion and debating of current community issues, written and oral composition, and functional reading skills.

Recommendations such as these would benefit the total middle school program since they rely on communication and implementation of combined group effort. They would also, however, enhance the English program as previously delineated due to the curriculum's continuing efforts to provide students of the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades with the most complete, well-rounded courses of study to date. Any improvements, therefore, in the total school program would positively effect the English curriculum. Due to the nature of the subject, English teachers are most able to take full advantage of any "pluses" beyond the set curriculum and weave them into daily lessons. Flexibility is of keynote importance for the teacher of such a viable curriculum as the English courses of study for the middle school grades. Such a reliable curriculum coupled with competent teachers and total middle school

program is necessary when working with the most changing of all students, the transescent. In theory, Baltimore County's English curriculum complements the students for whom it was written. For each teacher, only the challenge of implementing the curriculum as intended remains.

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